

LAND USE PROBLEMS IN INDIANA AND PROGRAMS OF ADJUSTMENT

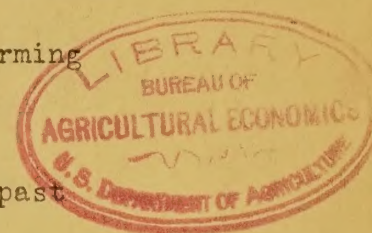
Gladwin E. Young
Regional Chief, Land Use Planning Section

Problems of proper utilization of our land resources have now become problems of national concern. We have become conscious of the fact that our traditional land policies have been responsible for using up our natural resources at an alarming rate.

Many of our agricultural ills are traceable to our past land policies. Floods, dust storms and erosion with consequent human distress are traceable to planless land use and are demanding a change in our national land policies.

American agriculture has been going through a transition period characteristic of a youthful nation. We have come to the end of that process of finding a solution by clearing new fields from forests and moving from worn-out lands to new virgin frontiers. Good agricultural lands are now settled and virgin forests are limited in extent. Unlimited export markets are no longer available for agricultural products. Free lands with low cost products from virgin fertility are gone.

As a nation we have, in the past, thought as little of conserving and developing properly our land resources as an unguided youth thinks of conserving his energies and developing his talents. We have developed our land resources quickly and



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used them wastefully without thought of exhaustion of natural resources or waste of human effort.

Now we have come of age. We are, for the first time, ready and willing to meditate upon the consequences of our past action and are able to apply mature judgment in planning for a more permanent use of our land resources. Some definite readjustments must be faced. It is to be expected that confusion will exist in our individual and national thinking as we continue our transition from the era of youthful, vigorous exploitation by hardy pioneers to new economic and social patterns that surely lie ahead.

United States Department of Agriculture Develops
Land Use Program

In the wake of our rapid agricultural expansion there have developed certain major agricultural problems directly traceable to our past land policies. One of these problems concerns the periodical situations of over-production without adequate production adjustment from an overexpanded agricultural plant. Another problem of national concern is the conservation of productive soils now being menaced by erosion. One of the most acute problems of conservation of human resources as well as conservation of land resources is to be found in our so-called submarginal farming areas.

In attempting to get at a solution to agricultural problems such as those mentioned, farmers acting individually are helpless. Effective conservation of our land resources requires

group action. Public funds to subsidize this group action is a national responsibility which must be met. This responsibility grows out of our past land policies that permitted and even encouraged too rapid expansion of our agriculture without a wise choice in the use of our lands. Past generations of farmers sharing in the rapid exploitation and over-expansion of our virgin agricultural resources left a heavy burden of adjustment on the present generation of farmers. Past generations of urban people who shared in cheap food from free land and virgin fertility also owe the present generation of farmers a debt. Our young government that disposed of millions of acres for individual use regardless of its suitability has created acute problems with which succeeding generations must cope. We, as a nation, are morally obligated to assume these debts and assist with the initiation of constructive land conservation programs. This generation of farmers cannot be asked to bear all the burden of making adjustments for misuses of our land resources by past generations.

The United States Department of Agriculture has been delegated the responsibility of developing programs that will conserve our land and water resources and devote these resources to their best suited uses. Some of the problems to be faced in developing such programs are illustrated in the following pages.

Acute Social and Economic Problems Arise in Submarginal Farming Areas

A major agricultural problem arising from past land policies is that found in farming areas where the basis of support for the

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population has contracted leaving, in effect, a stranded population. During our rapid agricultural expansion our frontier farmers cleared land from forests and plowed virgin grasslands that should have remained in forests and range pastures. Individual interests were undoubtedly served temporarily but from a national viewpoint; we must now pay the cost of reforestation and revegetation to control erosion, floods and dust storms which menace many more thousands of people than have been benefitted by unwise exploitation of our land resources.

The Agricultural Committee of the National Resources Board reports that there are now 75,000,000 acres of submarginal farm land being farmed in futile effort by 450,000 families. It is definitely a public responsibility to guide these persons to better opportunities and to devote the land to better uses. A period of several generations may be required for this adjustment. The nation must conserve its people and its resources.

Indiana is not exempt from the submarginal land problem. Studies made by our Land Use Planning Section, in cooperation with the Purdue University Agricultural Experiment Station, shows that there are approximately 1,500,000 acres of submarginal farm land in seventeen counties in southcentral Indiana. By submarginal farm land we mean that land which is so poorly adapted to farming that those attempting to farm it are unable to obtain sufficient income for an adequate living standard. Along with the individual poverty and privations in submarginal farm areas there has

developed an ever growing problem of maintaining adequate local governmental services. Rapidly increasing areas of tax delinquent land have developed only to be sold and resold to be devoted again to the use under which it became tax delinquent. These problems of inability of submarginal land to support individual living standards and local governmental services saddle an additional tax burden on others who must provide subventions to permit continued occupancy of such areas.

The fundamental situation that has developed in our poor land areas is that of a maladjustment of population to income-producing resources. This situation can be illustrated with some figures which our Land Use Planning Section has compiled for the purpose of determining where major changes in land use and major shifts in population should eventually take place.

In thirteen southern Indiana counties there were only a meagre seven acres of crops harvested for each person living on farms in 1929. In five of the best agricultural counties in the state twenty-six acres of crops per capita were harvested. In more than half the counties there were fourteen acres or more of harvested crops per capita.

In the same thirteen counties the value of farm products sold and used for each person living on farms averaged only \$203. In the five best agricultural counties the value was \$644 per person. In more than half of the counties the value of farm products sold or used was \$445 or more per capita.

These two factors calculated from the 1930 census show that the better agricultural counties have from two to three times more resources to support the present population than is found in our poorer agricultural counties.

An historical study of trends in land use and population movements shows that, from 1900 to 1930, population decreased more in the poor counties and land in farms decreased decidedly more in the poor counties than elsewhere in the state. Both of these figures show that for more than a generation people have been finding a way to move away from limited economic opportunities to better ones. It is also true, however, that the greatest increase in the number of farms since 1930 has taken place in the poor agricultural counties. The character of this back-to-the-land movement will be discussed later but, at this point, it should be emphasized that this movement of population out of the poor farming areas has not been completed. Further movement is inevitable and desirable. It should not be an unguided movement. One of the principal objectives of our land use program is to develop policies and procedures to assist with this desirable and inevitable farm population movement.

Unguided Back-to-the-Land Movement Creates Problem in
Poor Land Areas

It is very probable that everyone here has been directly or indirectly concerned with the back-to-the-land movement since 1930. The character and extent of the movement back to the land has differed with the opportunities in each community. You will be interested to learn how one community in an extremely poor agri-

cultural county has been affected by the movement of people back to the land.

Hamblen Township, Brown County, was one of the townships selected for study of this population movement by the Purdue University Agricultural Experiment Station. In this township 102 new families moved in from 1930 to 1934. The number of farms was increased by one-third and the number of school pupils was increased by one-third. One-half of the poor relief expended by the township went to the newcomers. In other words, the poor relief was doubled because of the emigration. The taxable wealth of the township was increased by less than one per cent by the additional taxable property brought in by the newcomers. That these newcomers created a burden upon the existing community is shown by the fact that all the taxes levied against newcomers amounted to only 16% of the total paid to them in poor relief alone.

Most of the people returning were unemployed and were seeking the cheapest possible place to subsist. Eighty per cent came directly from cities, but three-fourths of them had previous farm experience. Of those who operated farms for a full year previous to the time we made the survey the total gross income from the sale of farm products and work off the farm was only \$118.18. They averaged less than one horse per farm and only sixteen acres of crops per farm. More than half of the farms to which these people returned had been abandoned previously. In other words, these newcomers were attempting to establish themselves on farms where other farmers had already failed and had moved away.

It is significant that only thirty-seven per cent of these newcomers were returning to their home county. The largest single factor

influencing their return was the fact that it cost so little to find shelter in this area. More than fifty per cent of the families moved into houses that had stood vacant for more than a year. More than a third of these unoccupied houses had been abandoned between 1920 and 1925.

This is a brief picture of what had happened in one community. The movement was unguided and on a whole was unfortunate for the community to which they moved. It was also unfortunate for most of the newcomers themselves. The township to which they returned had a population of 2,093 in 1880 and in 1930 had a population of 932, a decrease of fifty-five per cent in fifty years. This movement of population away from the area was a fundamental effort on the part of individuals to adjust population to natural resources. This desirable adjustment has now been set back. At least two more generations will probably suffer social and economic losses struggling against hopeless odds before a similar stage of adjustment is again reached in this community.

The situation pictured for Hamblen Township, Brown County, is one of the most acute in Indiana although studies made by the Purdue University Agricultural Experiment Station and our Land Use Planning Section show that fifty or more townships comprising a million and a half acres have a similar picture.

Advantages of Public Purchase of Submarginal
Farm Land Demonstrated

The State of Indiana through its Conservation Department recognized the advantages to be gained by establishing state forests on this kind of land and consequently established an active acquisition

program in 1925. The Indiana Conservation Department was also instrumental in gaining the cooperation of the National Forest Service in establishing large National Forest purchase units in Southern Indiana in 1935.

In 1934 the submarginal land retirement program of the Federal Government was initiated in two demonstrational projects in Indiana. Under this program approximately 32,000 acres of submarginal farm land has been purchased in Martin County and approximately 20,000 acres in Brown County. It is contemplated that the land acquired in these two projects will be turned over to the Indiana Department of Conservation for permanent administration.

The objectives of these two projects have been to acquire, through voluntary sale, farms which are not productive enough to support a family, and to devote such lands to more productive and profitable uses. Individual farmers are unable to reforest large areas of land because of the long-time investment required. The sale of these unresponsive, worn-out acres to the Government has been in most instances a welcome opportunity for many families to escape with the small equity that is theirs into better opportunities elsewhere.

Not only has the purchase of these poor lands afforded an opportunity for families to improve their economic status but it has also served to reduce local governmental expenditures for roads, schools and relief. Local governmental expenditures in the 32,000 acre project area in Martin County have exceeded tax collections in

this same area by ten times. A saving to local units of \$20,000 annually in this project area will result from eliminating unnecessary roads; relocating high cost schools; removing the land from occupancy by transient families who demand relief, schools and roads yet pay no taxes; and by liquidating school fund mortgage loans and delinquent taxes which are a source of constant burden to the good-land areas.

In addition to offering an opportunity for stranded families to find new opportunities and in addition to relieving local taxpayers of the burden of supporting services in this poverty area, the submarginal land now purchased is being put to uses that are productive. Several hundred men in Brown and Martin Counties have been working for the past twenty months to reforest bare land, placing check dams in gullies, cutting undesirable trees from stands of young timber, preparing shelters and feed plots for wild life, constructing adequate fire protection systems, and building reservoirs for water conservation and flood control. All of this work has been directed toward the fullest development of the forest, wild life and recreational resources which are the real natural resources of this area.

In Martin County a dam is practically completed which will impound an 800 acre lake. In Brown County a smaller lake of 140 acres is being made. These lakes will serve recreational purposes and, in addition, will provide a needed source of water for wild life and will be effective in controlling rapid run-off from small watersheds that once contributed their influence to floods.

This submarginal land acquisition program has just completed its third year in Indiana. The last Congress expressed its interest in the continuation of this program by providing an appropriation of \$10,000,00 under Title III of the Bankhead-Jones Tenancy Act for continuation of the program of purchasing submarginal farm land. A share of this amount will probably be allocated to continue acquisition in Indiana.

County and State Governments Work With
Federal Program

In addition to the work of the Conservation Department, which has been mentioned, the Indiana Legislature has provided an enabling act which will permit zoning rural lands not suited to farming. This provision under the County Planning Board Act was sponsored by the Indiana State Planning Board.

Two additional pieces of legislation are needed to correct losses that are occurring in poor land areas. A change in the School Fund Mortgage Law is needed to reduce losses of principal and interest now being experienced by loans on poor land. A change is needed in our tax delinquency law to remove chronically tax delinquent land from further exploitation by private uses. More than a half million acres in southern Indiana are now delinquent for two years or more. The delinquent tracts have not sold at tax sale because they are so worthless no one would bid on them. They constitute a "no man's land" from the standpoint of ownership and "anybody's land" for occupancy by squatters and transients.

Martin County Takes Lead

County and township governments are not entirely helpless in assisting in the program of devoting submarginal farm land to better uses. Martin County is the ring-leader in pointing the way to other counties how poor land problems can be handled. Through active cooperation of the Martin County Agricultural Planning Committee, sponsored by the county agricultural agent, the County Farm Bureau, county officials and township trustees, a land classification map has been made showing the location of lands in the County not suited for farming uses. This classification shows that 52% of the county, or a total of 110,000 acres, is definitely unsuited to farming. The following facts reveal that the poor land area receives its equal share of public services but cannot contribute its proportionate share of the cost for such services. It will always be thus as long as people attempt to farm these tired and listless acres. The following facts substantiate this contention:

- (1) The 52% of the county comprising the non-farm land contributed only 10% of the tax revenue of the county in 1936.
- (2) Eighty-four per cent of the rural relief clients and persons receiving old age assistance live on land classified as not adapted to farming.
- (3) Martin County is losing \$10,000 annually on delinquent school fund mortgages. Eighty per cent of this amount is lost on mortgages in the non-farm area.

- (4) Seventy-nine per cent of all taxes that have been delinquent for four or more installments on real estate in the county are found in this non-farm area.

The people of Martin County are aware of the fact that the good land of the county is carrying a heavy burden caused by the misuse of poor land. As a result, they are withholding school fund mortgage loans from the classified area. They are carefully considering all new expenditures for roads to make sure they serve good land areas. They are working out plans for consolidation of schools between townships. Consideration is being given to zoning non-farm areas to prevent re-occupancy of abandoned farms. Serious consideration is being given by four township trustees toward consolidation into two townships. They are also requesting that the submarginal farm land acquisition program continue to assist them with their problem.

I have tried to set forth some of the basic land use problems that confront both individuals and the public. I have described in some detail the reasons for an aggressive program of public purchase of submarginal farm land that is being undertaken in order to assist individuals to make the necessary adjustment before a million and a half of our land in Indiana can be devoted to its best uses.

Obviously these conditions that have been developing for a century are not going to be corrected over night. We are confronted with difficult problems and numerous obstacles, but those of us directly concerned with the land program have a firm conviction of

The first part of the paper is devoted to a general
discussion of the problem. It is shown that the
problem is of great importance in the theory of
the differential equations of the second order.
The second part of the paper is devoted to a
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its value. We are encouraged by the general acceptance by the public. More than anything else we are receiving assurance through a wholesome and wholehearted approval of the people within the afflicted communities in which we are working.

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